

there is something else they are asking for and they are going to demand, and I think the Republican leadership has missed this because they want to talk about vouchers and take the money out of the public schools and that is wrong. We do not need to do that. We need to leave it in the public sector because it would drain the resources away and deny some children the opportunities they need. My colleagues, you and others who have participated in this this evening, I think we do have a better idea. We want to invest in a national commitment of education excellence, where schools are accountable to the taxpayers for raising those standards that you have just talked about and that every child has an opportunity to learn at a much higher level than ever before. I say that because improving education in this country is about creating a classroom environment where children can learn and teachers can teach. We need to foster greater connection between students, teachers and parents. When I say parents, I am talking about the community. Our schools can do better. They will do better. But they need our help to do better. They need our constructive help. They do not need our constant criticism, berating and pushing them down. A child knows when you are being positive and you are helping. You can be critical in a positive way. A child knows. So do their parents. They know if you really want to help. They also know if you are being condescending and you are ignoring them. We have a responsibility in my opinion, the highest body elected in this country, to provide that kind of leadership. We need to work together to get it done.

I think one of the best ways we can improve education is, number one, certainly what dollars we put out to reduce class sizes will not do it all. We know that. We are not that dumb. But we know it sends a powerful signal that we care. And about school facilities. We cannot build all the schools that need to be built. I put a bill in, the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL), and Congresswoman JOHNSON have come together on a bill to provide billions of dollars. That will not do it all, but it sends a powerful signal that we care. When we started in this country making sure that every person, and you remember this, would have a telephone, we were not here, but Congress said, by gosh, the person at the end of the line is going to have a telephone, we are going to have a policy that makes it happen. We were not involved in telecommunications until then. We were not involved in electricity until we decided that the person at the end of the line in the most rural part in the mountains is going to have electric power and it changed America. We can do it today. In an age when education is at a premium that it has never been at before in this country, we are beyond the time when we can educate 25 or 30 or 40 percent. We have to educate

100 percent. Every child has to be a part of it.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Someone once said that children are the living messages we send to a future we will never see. Children are the living messages we send to a future we will never see. As I listened, I could not help but think about the other day when I was jogging in a park near my home. As I was jogging, I literally ran past my eighth grade civics teacher. She waved. I did not realize it was her. Then I thought about it, I thought, she looks so familiar. I turned around and I said, Ms. Wilder, thank you for all that you have done for me. Thank you for all that you have done for me. Because I realized that here was someone who impacted my life back in the eighth grade, a son of two parents who never got past the first grade, but I knew that that teacher had impacted my life tremendously and taught me civics, some of which I use in this Chamber today, some 40 years later.

And so all I am saying to you is that I agree with you, and there is something else that I just want to add, a footnote to what you just said. The American people want our children to be all that they were meant to be. I think one of the saddest things is for someone to have the potential and not be given the opportunity to be all that they can be. What does that deprive this wonderful society of? Of doctors, of heart surgeons. We have a gentleman in Baltimore, Dr. Benjamin Carson at Johns Hopkins Hospital who was almost a dropout from school. Now he is one of the most renowned neurosurgeons in the world. All I am saying to you, when we think about what we are trying to do here and talking about our schools and lifting up our children, I just believe in my heart that every child when they are born, there are certain things that are in that child that an education brings out. When we do the things that we are doing, that is, give them fertile ground in which to grow, then they can become all that they can be. But if we do not give them those opportunities, the things you just talked about, giving them classes that are small enough so that they can learn, giving them teachers that are skilled, giving them computers so that they can learn the best technology, giving them the tools to allow them to grow, then they are not only deprived for a few years, they are deprived for a lifetime.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. The gentleman is absolutely correct. I remember something a friend of mine said when I started down this road to public life when I was really earning my living in the private sector where I was for 18 years. I was chairman of the board of county commissioners, he was on the board, we were here in Washington many years ago at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, incidentally, and he made a statement I have never forgotten, because we were involved in building schools and doing some things. He

said, "Don't ever forget, you are making decisions for people who have not yet been born." We forget that too many times. Here in this building, the United States Capitol, the most powerful Nation in the world, we cannot say we cannot take care of our children. We cannot say we cannot have a better education system because we can afford it and we can require excellence. We need to provide support for our teachers as they do their difficult, and it is a difficult job, but it is a critically important job, maybe one of the most important jobs we ever ask anyone to do outside of what families do for our children. We have had enough teacher bashing by people in this House, some of them on the other side of the aisle. Rather than talk about block grants to people, let us send the money down, I hear block grants as if that is the answer, make them compete for it. I was a superintendent for 8 years. You cannot plan a program on a block grant because you have got to compete for it every year. You only have a program when you have got money coming in and you know you are going to have it to hire quality teachers. People are not going to take jobs if they do not think they are going to have it next year. They will go somewhere else.

The final point that I would make, and it triggered a thought with me when I heard you talking about opportunities for all of us. I wonder how many of us who now currently have one of the greatest privileges any person can have, to serve in the United States House of Representatives, would be here had we not had an opportunity for good public education when we were growing up. I would not be here.

Mr. CUMMINGS. I know I would not either.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. I think a lot of my colleagues would not be here. I think we have to recognize that someone made a sacrifice for us. They paid taxes at my local school when school was really a nice building there, one of the nicest buildings in my community. I am grateful for that. If I ever complain about it, I hope someone will remind me, because I have a great debt to them. But I also have a debt to all the young people who are not my children because we only have three and they have been blessed to go through the public schools but I owe a debt to all the rest of the children. Because someday as one of my friends who was very successful, he will never have to worry about his Social Security because he is well off, but he made a statement serving on a task force that I had appointed my first year as superintendent to improve education. He said, I want every child to get a good education. I do not care where they come from. I do not care what their ethnic background is. I just want them to make a lot of money so I can draw Social Security.

He said that for a lot of folks who were not there because he did not need the Social Security. But he was making a statement of values, a statement